PROGRAM

8:15 – 8:45 am ..... *Morning Coffee / Tea*

8:45 – 9:00 am ..... Welcome and Introductory Remarks

MICHAEL X. DELLI CARPINI
Annenberg School Dean

BARBIE ZELIZER
Director of the Scholars Program

9:00 – 10:45 am ..... Producing Identity

FRANCOIS JOST

LARRY GROSS

LAURA GRINDSTAFF

MARK ANTHONY NEAL

Respondent: Mark Andrejevic

Moderator: Keren Tenenboim-Weinblatt,
Annenberg Ph.D. Candidate

10:45 – 11:00 am ..... *Refreshments*

11:00 – 12:30 pm ..... Laboring the Self

TANIA LEWIS

GARETH PALMER

HELEN WOOD

Respondent: Katherine Sender

Moderator: Adrienne Shaw,
Annenberg Ph.D. Candidate

12:30 – 1:30 pm ..... *Lunch*

1:30 – 3:00 pm ..... Performing the Nation

ZALA VOLCIC

ASWIN PUNATHAMBEKAR

FABIENNE DARLING-WOLF

Respondent: Marwan Kraidy

Moderator: Oren Livio,
Annenberg Ph.D. Candidate

3:00 – 3:15 pm ..... *Refreshments*

3:15 – 4:45 pm ..... Governing the Popular

NICK COULDRY

SEAN JACOBS

STEPHEN COLEMAN

Respondent: Toby Miller

Moderator: Tara Liss-Marino,
Annenberg Ph.D. Candidate

4:45 – 5:15 pm ..... Closing Remarks

MARWAN KRAIDY & KATHERINE SENDER,
Associate Professors, Annenberg School

5:15 – 7:00 pm ..... *Reception*

REAL worlds

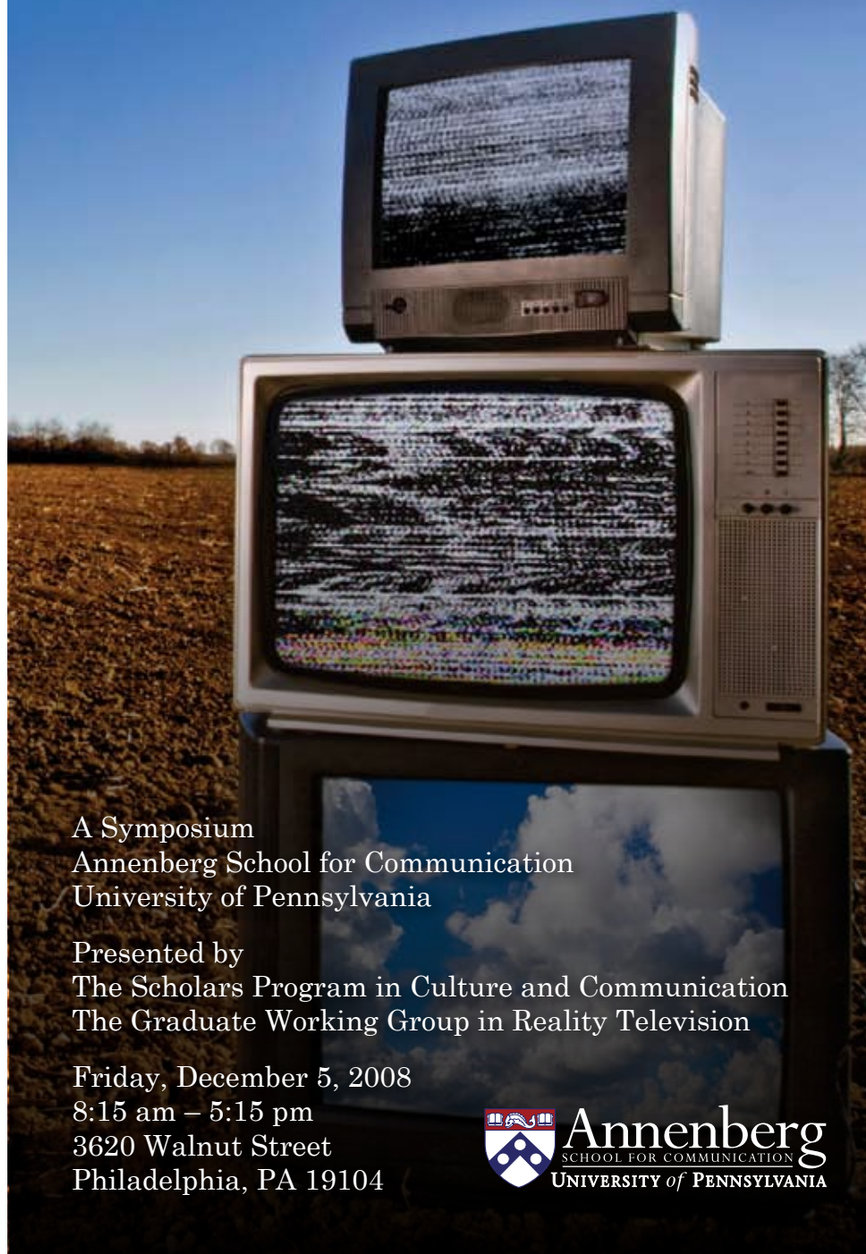
GLOBAL PERSPECTIVES *on the* POLITICS OF REALITY TELEVISION

Scholars Program in Culture & Communication
The Annenberg School for Communication
University of Pennsylvania
3620 Walnut Street
Philadelphia, PA 19104

www.scholars.asc.upenn.edu

REAL worlds

GLOBAL PERSPECTIVES *on the* POLITICS OF REALITY TELEVISION



A Symposium
Annenberg School for Communication
University of Pennsylvania

Presented by
The Scholars Program in Culture and Communication
The Graduate Working Group in Reality Television

Friday, December 5, 2008
8:15 am – 5:15 pm
3620 Walnut Street
Philadelphia, PA 19104

Annenberg SCHOOL FOR COMMUNICATION
UNIVERSITY of PENNSYLVANIA

SPEAKERS & respondents

MARK ANDREJEVIC
University of Iowa

STEPHEN COLEMAN
University of Leeds, UK

NICK COULDRY
Goldsmiths University of London, UK

FABIENNE DARLING-WOLF
Temple University

LAURA GRINDSTAFF
University of California, Davis

LARRY GROSS
University of Southern California

SEAN JACOBS
University of Michigan

FRANÇOIS JOST
Université de la Sorbonne Nouvelle, Paris III, France

MARWAN KRAIDY
Annenberg School for Communication

TANIA LEWIS
La Trobe University, Australia

TOBY MILLER
University of California, Riverside

MARK ANTHONY NEAL
Duke University

GARETH PALMER
University of Salford, UK

ASWIN PUNATHAMBEKAR
University of Michigan

KATHERINE SENDER
Annenberg School for Communication

ZALA VOLCIC
University of Queensland

HELEN WOOD
De Montfort University, UK

ABSTRACTS

Theatres of Power: the live streaming of domination, manipulation, coercion, seduction and acting out on British television

STEPHEN COLEMAN

This paper explores how power is imagined and enacted in two contexts of live television streaming: Channel Four's 24/7 coverage of the Big Brother house and BBC Parliament's daily live coverage of the House of Commons. By elucidating mediated discourses of power, I argue that power is a specific rather than general phenomenon; power takes a number of forms that are best understood in their particularity; displays of power entail performances that, in the Big Brother house and the House of Commons, can be understood as theatres of representation; and the forms of live streaming examined here offer ways for audiences to make sense of the power relationships that govern their lives.

Making Populations Appear

NICK COULDRY

This paper reviews the stakes that political and media institutions have in reality production on a comparative basis. It considers the argument that US reality TV provides models of neoliberal governance, and its limitations when extended to different parts of the world. It also addresses the contrasting strengths of a ritual-based model, with its emphasis on the shoring up of media institutions' authority and representative power. A broader account will emerge of the dynamics that underlie reality TV's embedding in the survival strategies of media and governmental institutions at times of huge technological change, declining participation in elections, and emerging forms of politics.

World citizens "à la française": Star Ac' and the negotiation of "French" identities

FABIENNE DARLING-WOLF

Based on textual analyses of the seventh season of the French version, this paper investigates how the reality show *Star Academy* serves to both reassert and negotiate French national identities in light of urgent political issues. *Star Academy's* ability to influence national agendas while simultaneously positioning participants—and, by extension, audiences—as "citizens of the world" is critically examined to position the show as a non-threatening vehicle for the negotiation of multiple modes of "French" citizenship, and a site for the reasserting of French significance in a global context.

"Just Be Yourself – Only More So": The Production of Ordinariness and the Ordinariness of Production in Reality Television

LAURA GRINDSTAFF

In this paper I use two case studies to reflect on what it means to produce "ordinariness" in a television context: a participant observation study of daytime talk shows in the late 1990s and a new study of MTV's series *Sorority Life*. The production efforts of both genres reproduce "authenticity" as taken-for-granted cultural scripts about class and gender rather than representing participants' "real" biography or personality. I explore discourses of authenticity surrounding "ordinary" people on television, asking who has access to participating on television, who/what shapes television production practices, and how these practices authenticate certain versions of reality over others.

Making Us Feel Mighty Real? Hollywood's New Double Standard

LARRY GROSS

"Reality" programs, including *The Real World*, *Survivor*, *Boy Meets Boy* and *Queer Eye for the Straight Guy*, take the presence of openly gay people for granted; in programs aimed at coveted younger viewers the presence of gay people is a necessary guarantor of realism. Yet, at the same time, Hollywood's aspiring young actors remain firmly hidden behind closet doors. This paper explores the contradictions between the assumption of queer inclusiveness in "reality" programming and the enforced duplicity on the part of Hollywood's own gay actors through interviews with actors, agents, publicists and producers of reality and dramatic programs.

Big Brother, Africa is Watching: Reality TV and the Expansion of South African Capital

SEAN JACOBS

For six weeks in 2003, viewers on the African continent were glued to their television screens for *Big Brother Africa*, in which twelve contestants were cloistered in a house in South Africa's commercial and media capital Johannesburg. This paper explores the relation between cultural production of shows like *Big Brother Africa* and South African business' continental ambitions. I suggest that reality TV shows serve as a convenient means to expose continental markets to South African products, but also to export discourses about race, class, gender and political rights that have been circulating inside South Africa, often in unintended ways.

When Real TV is a Job

FRANÇOIS JOST

This talk argues that the success of reality TV arises from its equidistant positioning from the real world, the world of fiction and the ludic world, giving reality shows a malleability that is observable in strategies of communication surrounding reality TV. That malleability has surfaced in recent court litigations involving participants of *Temptation Island* (*L'Île de la tentation*) and the show's producers, where the court ruling confirmed that participants were role playing a story about people who, though adults, are unable to exit childhood and become autonomous.

Tele-ethics: Makeover TV and the Global Citizen

TANIA LEWIS (AND FRAN MARTIN)

In the US and UK, the 'primetiming' of makeover TV often reflects the increasing dominance of a neoliberal, consumer-driven approach to lifestyle issues in which late modern selfhood is endlessly malleable. To what extent, though, can these developments be applied to Asian contexts? We compare "green makeover" lifestyle programs from Taiwan, Singapore, and Australia to examine the claim that the rise of lifestyle formats is "an instance of new transnational […] configurations of subjectivity and functions of television as a medium" (Bignell). Lifestyle TV, we suggest, functions both as a global genre associated with western lifestyle-oriented consumer practices *and* as a media form strongly shaped by national and local cultural contexts and concerns.

Race(ing) Reality

MARK ANTHONY NEAL

Race has played a critical role in many of the most popular American reality television shows, whether as commentary on American meritocracy or as evidence of the historical tropes of blackness within popular media and culture. But reality television has also become a site where black celebrities have sought to trouble the relationship between their media persona(s) and their "real" identities, often broadening their popular appeal by establishing new "brands" in the process. Reality shows based around two icons of hip-hop culture, William Drayton aka Flava Flav and Calvin Brodnus aka Snoog Doog are interesting in this regard. Their respective shows *Flava of Love* and *Fatherhood* both engage in labor that de-couples the performances of black masculinity thought inherent to the function of hip-hop culture and in the process establish a broader context for the performance of both black masculinity and hip-hop.

Body Matters

GARETH PALMER

Reality Television's most significant effect may be its promotion of surveillance, helping us to re-think our relationship to authority in public space and to prepare us for the extension of the security apparatus over the past decade. Looking at programs such as *The Biggest Loser*, *Honey We're Killing the Kids* and *You Are What You Eat*, this paper considers how reality television represents the body as a space for responsible care and conduct, offering us the opportunity to work through choices offered by experts of the self. The surveillance ethic of reality television now enters the body to produce a completely monitored self.

Indian Idol: Reality TV and the Making of Mobile Publics in Contemporary India

ASWIN PUNATHAMBEKAR

In 2007, media coverage of *Indian Idol* focused on a decline in northeast India's decades-old separatist identities to mobilize support for Amit Paul, a finalist from the region. This moment of fan expression soon took on an explicitly political character. Situating this media event in relation to (a) the socio-historical context of identity politics, and (b) the relationship between media and political mobilization in postcolonial India, I argue that the dynamics of reality TV have created what I term "mobile publics," a heuristic to assess the new cultural and political possibilities of media convergence.

That's Me: Nationalism, Power and Identity on Balkan Reality TV

ZALA VOLCIC

We consider *That's Me*, a *Big Brother* style Balkan reality TV show filmed in Macedonia in 2004 and 2005. Described as an attempt to promote peaceful co-existence in a Yugoslav region still recovering from the conflicts of the 1990s, the show symbolically negotiates the struggles between religious, ethnic, and national groups that still plague the former Yugoslav region. Reality TV politics turn citizens into consumers, foster a savvy attitude toward the staged character of politics, and transpose political problems into the personal realm, embracing the participatory promise of reality TV as a form of ersatz democracy.

Reality TV: The politics and pleasures of an extended social/public realm

HELEN WOOD

Writing on reality television often suggests that the genre invokes a different relationship between text and viewer, but these claims are often made without evidence from audience research. This paper discusses how viewers are drawn into an 'immanent' relationship with reality television as an 'extended social/public realm', drawing from audience research data from four groups of women from South East London. Using a 'text-in-action' method, the study shows how viewers react to reality television whilst they view. Rather than seeing the social realm created by television as necessarily horizontal (implied in the work of theorists like Paddy Scannell), the paper discusses how audiences resource their affective reactions to television participants through their own access to moral authority, which is revealing of material, social and cultural distinction.